

BY: LARRY L. BOST

DESERT RATS is available from World Wide Wargamers, Eton Lodge, Highwood, North Chelmsford, Essex, United Kingdom, CM1 3QH for the low price of...is it \$10.00 or \$13.00?...I guess it is about \$13.00...there doesn't seem to be a price listing anywhere on the box.

This is another fine example of the wargames that are coming out of WWW in the UK. These people have been billed as the "English Cousins" of SPI...but they have far surpassed them in my estimation. DESERT RATS was researched and designed by Jim Hind; playtested by Keith Poulter and Chris Hunt; and graphically presented by David Green. Their fine talents have combined to produce a superb wargame.

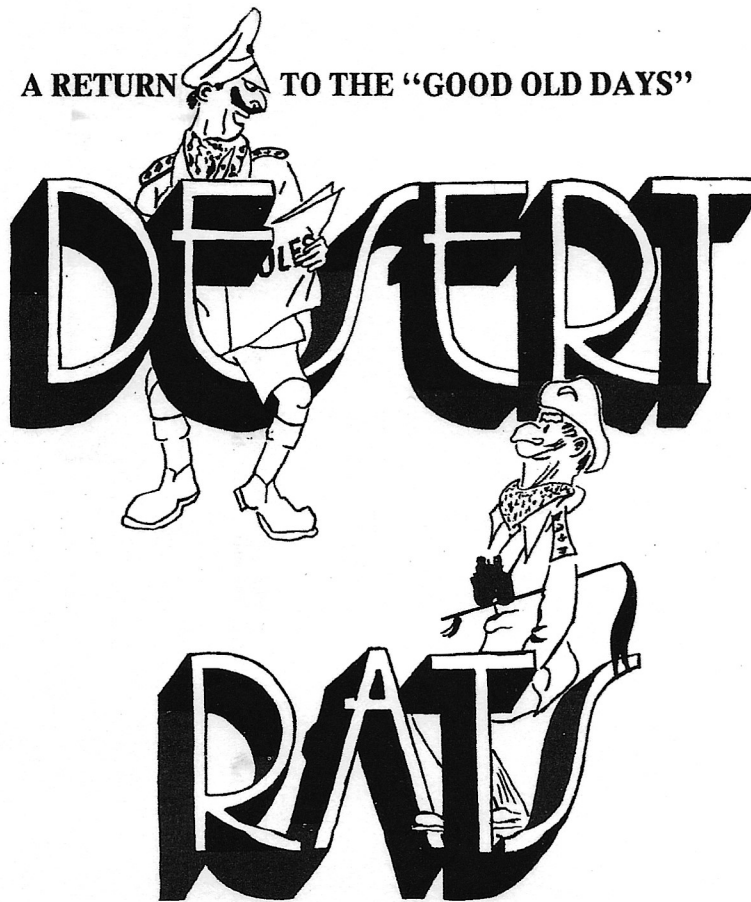
It is, perhaps, the time to mention the striking similarity between the WWW organization and the "good old" halcyon days of Avalon Hill. Some people might take offense that I should dare to compare WWW with AH...but there is no offense intended and the products that WWW have been turning out with consistency will never give offense. I mention their similarity only because it takes me back many years to those days when there was only one wargame company...when there was only one title every year...and when everyone knew the current rules to that title. In those days you were learning a new wargame...researching history to find out if it was accurate...and then trying to make the changes that were needed. You were also having a damned good time playing the game in the meantime because it was above all else...playable and fun. I had thought that the world of American designers had "kissed goodbye" to that period and it would seem that I was right. It took an English company to return me to "those exciting days of yesteryear" when I could read the rules, set up the game, and soundly thrash my opponent...all in one afternoon while enjoying myself immeasurably. Maybe I sound like a reactionary...but I smile a lot.

DESERT RATS is a two-player game covering the Campaign in the Western Desert between December of 1940 and December of 1942. The well-known opponents are the forces of the British Empire and the German-Italian forces commanded predominantly by Erwin Rommel. The game has a variety of starting points and ending points and can range in length from 3 turns to 25. Each different "start date" changes the initial deployment and effects the victory conditions. The game scale is not unusual with 1 turn equaling 1 month, each hex measuring approximately 8 miles across, and the units varying in size from battalions to divisions.

The game components are very simple and almost frugal. There is a 16-page rule book, 182 die-cut counters, and two map sheets that measure 24 X 16" each (the maps join end-to-end so you have a 24 X 32" playing surface).

The playing pieces for DESERT RATS are superb. The Empire and Commonwealth forces are printed black on beige, the Germans are black on brown, the Italians are black on light green, and the bookkeeping counters are black on white. The types of units and markers represented include;

A RETURN TO THE "GOOD OLD DAYS"



supply, captured supply, armor, infantry, motorized infantry, reconnaissance, anti-tank (88's), the British Special Forces unit, step reduction markers, wreck markers, and fortified box markers. The counters are very well done and are of the highest quality. They could have been produced by any one of the American gaming companies and are every bit as professional.

The rules are well-written and not at all hard to understand...but they suffer slightly from disorganization. There are many kinds of rules on the game market today and I do not advocate the type of "rulese" found in SPI products. I do, however, feel that DESERT RATS should have been screened a little more carefully to make it "idiot proof". Rules should attempt to immediately answer the questions that reading them will naturally bring up. The reader should not be referred to a later section of the rules if at all possible. DESERT RATS does not confuse the game...even the beginners will find it easy to work with...but I might recommend using a yellow felt tip marker to emphasize the more important areas for quick reference.

DESERT RATS has a rather unique turn sequence which reflects a great deal of thought on the part of the designer. The phasing player usually elects to begin his turn with movement. He can move as much or as little as he likes up to his allowance. He may...at any time...elect for a "round of combat". When he does this, all of his units are deemed to have expended as many movement points (MP's) as the unit having moved the farthest at that time. The round of combat is then resolved and the phasing player may then

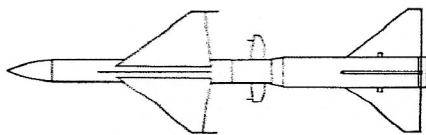
either move or elect for another round of combat. He may continue in this manner and in any order he chooses until he has expended all of his MP's or decides to cease operations for that turn. This creates a most fluid and flexible system of movement and combat. It forces players to maintain zones of control or suffer the consequences. You can't readily leave a defensive unit alone or the enemy will isolate it easily and they can also hit weak spots in a defensive line to force retreats so as to isolate stronger defensive positions. True...it is impossible to eliminate motorized forces through isolation...but it is possible to lose a vital defensive position or to have those isolated forces significantly reduced when they "break-out" of the encirclement.

The map includes such terrain as clear, sand, rough, desert tracks, the coast road, depression, ridges, escarpment, the Nile, and towns...printed in 6 colors. The significant differences in this and other "desert game" maps is that this one shows the Nile River, The Nile Delta region, Alexandria, Cairo, and the Egyptian Wire (the frontier between Libya and Egypt). Rommel finally may get his chance to bath in the waters of the sacred River of the Pharaohs.

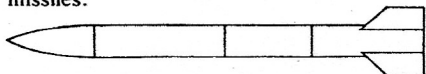
If you haven't already guessed...DESERT RATS is a much-improved version of the old Avalon Hill classic AFRIKA KORPS. Much of the game mechanics and concepts are familiar...but that is not to say that it is a simple copy with changes. World Wide Wargamers have gone several steps further and made many significant additions and improvements. THIS is the game that I al-

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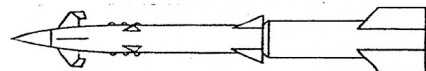
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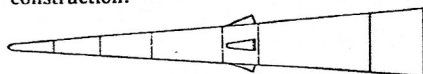
GRIFTON: is the NATO designation for this 54 foot, 22,000 pound, 155 mile range SAM. It has command guidance with active radar homing (its own transmitter as well as receiver onboard) and can carry nuclear or conventional warheads. It is believed to have an intercept capability against tactical and possibly strategic surface-to-surface missiles.



SAM-D: stands for surface-to-air missile development and is the designated successor for both the HAWK and the Nike Hercules missiles. It is 17 feet long, long ranged, and utilizes an advanced guidance system in which missile radar assists the ground radar in target location and intercept. A ground computer analyzes the incoming data and directs the missile to the intercept point where it is commanded to explode. SAM-D batteries will have 4 fire units. Each with its own radar/computer unit and missile launching trailers. Since the radars will be electronically scanned phased array units, it will be possible for the SAM-D battery to simultaneously attack 4 targets while tracking others. (HAWK can only attack 2 at a time and Hercules only 1 at a time). SAM-D will have both nuclear and conventional warheads and will be able to intercept tactical surface-to-surface missiles.



SPARTAN: (XLIM-49A) is the long range interceptor assigned to the American Safeguard ABM system which has recently been ordered closed by Congress. It is 55 feet long, weighs 28,660 pounds, has a range of 460 miles, is command guided and carries a thermonuclear warhead of about 5 Megatons. Spartan would intercept incoming ICBM's outside the Earth's atmosphere and either destroy them or neutralize their warheads. The first Safeguard site became operational in 1975 and is already being disassembled. Its opposite number in Soviet service, the Galosh, is operational outside Moscow where additional sites are under construction.



SPRINT: is the short range complement to Spartan. It is 27 feet long, weighs 7,500 pounds, and has a range of 25 miles. It has radar command guidance, is detonated by ground command and has a Kiloton range warhead. It destroys ICBM's inside of the earth's atmosphere (below 100,000 feet) and was deployed to defend the American Minuteman missiles deployed in North Dakota until the closure order.

Due to the nature of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), the future of ABM's is in doubt...but the future of SAM's in general would seem to be assured as the need to protect ground forces from air attack continues.

This concludes Part II of our series on modern missiles. Part III will cover shipboard missiles with the exception of Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM's) which will be covered later in the series. Your comments and questions remain welcomed. ■

DESERT RATS... Continued from P.10

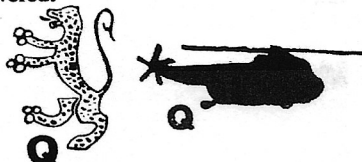
ways wanted AK to be. DESERT RATS makes provisions for the repair of wrecked tanks, building fortified boxes, the marvelous German 88's, inexperienced units, concealed movement, and the retreat of mechanized units through enemy zones of control.

DESERT RATS has made a significant contribution to the library of "desert war" games. There have been many such operational level "desert games"...but WWW has done the hobby a service by giving us a vastly more realistic game than AFRIKA KORPS without the vastly more difficult rules and procedures of other companies.

The campaign game of DESERT RATS is the best of the 5 scenarios and presents the most problems as well. The British, Germans, and Italians all suffer from the problem of logistics. You will never lose your army to a 2-turn lack of supplies, as in AK, but you may spend long and desperate turns wondering when in hell the goodies will arrive from the rear. Your entire game can be won or lost on how well you use and guard your supplies. You might do well to consider going a long way out of your way in order to capture or destroy your enemy's supplies...it will paralyze him and allow you to chew him to pieces or force a withdrawal. Another "old favorite" principle of war that comes in handy here is to maintain a strategic reserve.

In summation...DESERT RATS is going to be one of your favorite games as soon as you get it. All of the fun and free-wheeling of AFRIKA KORPS with the significant addition of greater realism...a real winner if I ever saw one. ■

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